

## **Transcription: Bob McKeon**

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*Today is Monday, March 12, 2012. My name is James Crabtree. This afternoon I'm interviewing Mr. Bob McKeon.*

**Bob McKeon:** Your last name is Crabtree?

*Crabtree. Yes sir. This interview is being done in person at Mr. McKeon's residence here in Hutto, Texas. It is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to let me interview you today. It's an honor for me and for this program. The first question we always start off with is just tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went in the military.*

**Bob McKeon:** All right. I was born May 13, 1919, in New York City, New York. I'd like to preface my remarks by saying in 1918, my mother and father were living in New York City. At that particular time, there was a flu epidemic that was encircling the world. And it got its name, Spanish Influenza, because they thought it had started in Spain. But it circled the globe, and during the Second World War, soldiers were dying more from flu in Europe than they were from actual combat. My parents lost three children in one week. In 1918, they lost three children in one week from this influenza because they had no medical background to fight this disease. Anyway, when they went to the cemetery, you had to get on line to get in. There were so many people had died during 1918. Meanwhile, World War I was being fought in Europe and, as I said, there was more people dying from the flu than there was in actual combat.

*So you were born a year afterwards?*

**Bob McKeon:** Oh, I was born a year after, that's right.

*How old were your siblings when they died?*

**Bob McKeon:** How old were they? They were three, five, and seven.

*And they all died in the same year?*

**Bob McKeon:** They all died. All of them. Everybody. They were dying in Army camps where there were programs being trained in Louisiana during the First World War. They were dying overseas. It was a terrible thing. They were dying. They figured that about 20 million people died from that influenza. It happened in New York City, in Philadelphia, Boston, Cincinnati, all over the United States.

*I've seen pictures of people wearing the masks and the quarantines that they implemented.*

**Bob McKeon:** Yes. They didn't know what to do. They didn't know what to do to handle it.

*So when you were born, did you have any . . .*

**Bob McKeon:** I was born a year later.

*Did you have any living siblings? Or were those your only three siblings?*

**Bob McKeon:** Oh no, I did. I had two brothers.

*Two other brothers.*

**Bob McKeon:** Yeah.

*Did your parents talk to you much later, as you grew up, about your siblings you lost?*

**Bob McKeon:** I was 15 years old before I knew that I had siblings who had died from that. Because my father, my mother took out a picture when I was 15 years old. She showed me the picture of those who had died. But my father didn't want to know anything, he didn't want to hear about it anymore. He was so devastated.

*I imagine. I can't imagine how tough that was.*

**Bob McKeon:** So anyway, I was born in 872 First Avenue in Manhattan, New York City. I was raised there until I was seven years old. Then we moved to a borough called Queens, in New York City. I grew up in New York City. And then, I was, pertaining to the war, I was drafted in January of 1943.

*Okay.*

**Bob McKeon:** I was drafted and they sent me to a camp out in Long Island called Camp Upton.

*Okay.*

**Bob McKeon:** What it was, it was a depot out there at that camp. They were forming different groups of armies and divisions and they needed replacements or to start a new outfit. In other words, I would be standing by and all of a sudden I get a call. And all of a sudden, they said, "Mr. McKeon, you're going to go to Massachusetts." They said, "Sorry, but that was turned down. Where you're going to go is Texas." And I got on a train a week later, I got on the train with other men, and we were sent down to Paris, Texas. And in Paris, Texas, you know where Paris, Texas is? By Paris, Texas, there was a camp there. They had formulated a new camp, Camp Maxey, Texas. Our outfit, we were formulated, and I became a part of the 251<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery Battalion. The 251<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery Battalion. We stayed there and then went on maneuvers in Shreveport, Louisiana, while I was stationed in Paris, Texas. We went on maneuvers in Shreveport. And then, we came back to Paris, Texas, in the camp. By this time, all of 1943 is gone. We were trained. Then we got word. By the way, there was an outfit across the road from us. This camp had two outfits. The 251<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery, which I was a part of, we went to San Francisco. We were going to go to, we went across the Pacific. Meanwhile, across the road was another outfit, the 250<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion. They went to Europe. Because I contacted the, they had an address and a telephone number in the Veterans of Foreign Wars, about reunions. And I didn't see my outfit having a reunion. But the 250<sup>th</sup> did.

*That's neat.*

**Bob McKeon:** I called them up and they told me that they had gone to Europe. Meanwhile . . .

*Let me ask you real quick, sir. What were you doing when you were drafted? Were you working in New York at the time?*

**Bob McKeon:** I was still in New York City when I was drafted. I was put down as 3A because I was supporting, helping support my family. But then they changed my category from 3A to 1A. Now 1A means that anytime you can be picked up and sent, picked up and go into the service.

*Why do you think they changed the classification? Was it just because they needed more men at that point?*

**Bob McKeon:** I wasn't sure. I think that it was, that each place, office, had a group of people, men, that were listed in their, and they had to supply a certain amount of people.

*The draft boards?*

**Bob McKeon:** I'm sorry, that's what it was. It was the draft board. They sent so many a month. And then they got down to review the 3As, why were they 3As? They even had 4Fs. 4F meant that you were physically disabled, you couldn't, you're not going to be drafted. There was something physically wrong with you. You had heart trouble or bad eyesight.

*When you got your draft notice, was it a telegram or just a regular piece of mail?*

**Bob McKeon:** It was just a regular card, to report down to the draft board.

*But when you got that, you must have known you were being drafted, right?*

**Bob McKeon:** Yeah, oh yeah. As soon as they said 1A, that was a good . . . Like for example, I had a brother at home and he became 1A. But when he went down for his physical, they turned him down. I remember my brother saying to me, "You know Robbie, I said to the men who examined me and turned me down, 'There must be something I can do. Can't I load trucks? Something.'" But anyway, he never went in and I went in.

*Were you the only one in your family to go in or did you have another . . . ?*

**Bob McKeon:** No. I had a brother, another brother, but he was married with five children.

*Okay. He was exempt.*

**Bob McKeon:** He was deferred because he had five children.

*How did you folks feel about you going off to war?*

**Bob McKeon:** Very upset. Because they had already lost all those children from the flu, from the Spanish Flu. So they were very upset about that.

*When you got to Texas and they started training you, what was your specialty? Were you a radio operator?*

**Bob McKeon:** I was a radio operator.

*Radio operator with the artillery battalion?*

**Bob McKeon:** With the field artillery battalion. My position was I was a radio operator with the field artillery battalion. What I would do is, I'd have this radio on my back, and I'd go up with

this officer from the field artillery battalion, and we would report to the infantry who was maneuvering in a certain area. The infantry officer would tell my artillery officer that he can't get through a certain area. "I want you to start shelling that area." So the officer of the field artillery battalion, which I was with, he would get the coordinates of that area that the Japanese were in, and then he'd tell me the coordinates and I would press my button and I'd call back to the battalion which were probably, say, four or five miles in the rear. And we'd give them the coordinates and then they'd fire.

*Could you see the impact area? Was he a forward observer? Is that what he was called?*

**Bob McKeon:** I was with the forward observer. Yes, because the forward observer from the infantry, he had to see if this was . . .

*That's right. You have to be able to just fire, right?*

**Bob McKeon:** Right, he would want to see if the firing was going on. If it was too far ahead, then he'd say, "New coordinates." Until they got in.

*Get it bracketed, right? Fire over and under?*

**Bob McKeon:** But as you advance, sometimes you thought that all the Japanese were gone, but they weren't gone at all.

*They were dug in?*

**Bob McKeon:** They were dug in and they'd fire back at you.

*So you did a lot of training in Texas. When was it that you shipped into the Pacific?*

**Bob McKeon:** Oh, I'm sorry. I was in Camp Maxey, Texas, until 1943. In 1944, I was sent from Camp Maxey, Texas. We were told we were going to go overseas. And we weren't sure which way we were going to go, to Europe or the Pacific. But when they told us that we were going to go, we're going to be sent to San Francisco, California, we knew that that was the Pacific. So we went to, everything was by train. We went by train. It must have took us about three or four days and something interesting happened. We got halfway to San Francisco and we stopped at Denver, Colorado, and we lost one of the men. He walked away and started sightseeing. We finally got a hold of him.

*So he hadn't deserted, he just got lost.*

**Bob McKeon:** He just got lost. The train pulled out and he was left in Denver. But they finally got him. So we all landed, my outfit arrived at San Francisco and we stayed there about a week I presume. I think it was about a week in San Francisco. And then we got on this boat, heading for, we didn't know where we were going to go. It must have taken us about 25 days. It was so slow. We had to go across the whole Pacific which is about 10,000 miles to New Guinea. That's where we disembarked from the ship. We were in New Guinea.

*How would you kill time on the ship? Would you play cards, read?*

**Bob McKeon:** We played cards. A lot of the men got very upset because they said, “We’re not getting anything to eat here.” All they were doing was giving us sandwiches. It took us about 25 days. We finally landed at a town, a little seaport, in New Guinea. The name of it was Finschhafen. Finschhafen was originally, this part of New Guinea was originally a German colony before the First World War. But after the First World War ended, the Japanese had been with the allies during the First World War and they picked up all these German colonies because that was their gratitude for them coming in on the allied side. Little did they know that they were going to have to fight all these islands like the Marshalls, the Gilberts, these were all like German colonies. They gave them as a reward. So anyway, we landed in Finschhafen, in New Guinea, in February of 1944. They used my outfit for different reasons. They wouldn’t send a whole outfit out. They sent just one unit like an A battery. We were made up of three batteries. A battery, B, and C. They would send one battery out to help support a certain thing. Meanwhile, I come down with . . . Right now, as I’m sitting across from you, I got this terrible skin trouble. I’m always under a dermatologist. It breaks out on my scalp and my face. When I got to New Guinea, everything. I got jungle rot. My face started to break out with jungle rot. All my body had, I was attacked by this skin disease while I was in New Guinea. But basically, my outfit did not participate in any large-scale engagements with the enemy because in this part of New Guinea, the Australians had already fought, under MacArthur, because the Japanese were coming down from the Dutch East Indies and they had come, and the Solomon Islands, and they were coming down New Guinea, and they were going to invade Australia.

*So New Guinea was pretty calm by the time you arrived with your unit?*

**Bob McKeon:** That’s right. What they did is, while I was there, I didn’t realize what was going on at that point. What they did is they jungle hopped. They went up, instead of fighting every little Japanese outfit like Aitape, that was a big Japanese, and Rabaul was a big seaport where the Japanese. They just says, “Let them stay there. We’re going to go past them. Let them die on the vine. We don’t care about them.”

*Where did your unit go to next after New Guinea?*

**Bob McKeon:** The first week of January, we went up to the Philippines.

*January of ’45?*

**Bob McKeon:** January of ’45, and we went to the Lingayen Gulf. In fact, this is the place, the Lingayen Gulf in Luzon, was where the Japanese had invaded when they first come in and took over the Philippines. Now we’re coming back and we’re coming the same way. We’re coming into the Lingayen Gulf and to Luzon. Anyway, I’m a radio operator. So as soon as we land in the Philippines, we went right into action. Day by day, week after week, we started to push the Japanese across Luzon, which is the main island of the Philippines. And we shoved them all the way up to the north.

*You were always with the forward observers during this time?*

**Bob McKeon:** What happened was, there was a fellow. I got a picture of him. I wanted to show him before you go. We land in Luzon and the infantry is moving slowly across the island, maybe 10 miles in. They call my outfit. “We want you to send a radio operator up here because we want the radio operator to go with the infantry observer.” Because that’s what the combination is. The

infantry observer is telling my field artillery observer where he wants the shells. So I was the second radio operator. There was the first guy. He went up. They say, "All right, Freddy." His name was Freddy, a nice boy from New York state. They said, "Fred, you have to go up now because this is . . . ." We're running in every week. So Fred says . . . He's the first guy to go up. I'm going up if he got sick. But he wasn't sick. And he went up, the first day he went up with the infantry, he was killed. So the ironic part of all this, is what I get is, if that day he happened to be sick, or he couldn't go up with the infantry, I would be the guy, I would have to . . .

*It would have been you.*

**Bob McKeon:** That's my claim to fame. I'd have to go up.

*So when you went up to replace him, you knew he had been killed.*

**Bob McKeon:** No, I went.

*You didn't know that he'd been killed.*

**Bob McKeon:** Oh yeah, we knew right away because he never came back. It was sad. A wonderful man. And so I went up and all the time I was up there with the infantry, it was never, certain areas I'd be shelled, but I was never injured or anything like that. And then.

*How often would your unit have a firing mission? Pretty much constant?*

**Bob McKeon:** Continuously. Most of the time continuously. Because the infantry, you know, they didn't like it. They didn't like this area. They were afraid that something's going to happen if we go in there. They'd ask for fire power to make sure. And so my outfit, the 105 Howitzer, it could be attached to the truck. The Howitzer itself can be attached to the truck. The other ones, like the 155, that's got to be moved slowly. But the 105 can move fast. We could be pushed in an area and taken out and pushed back. So what happened was that I was in Luzon and I noticed my heart was . . . My heart had always had like a tremolo, like you know, beat fast. So I went to the doctor and I told him about it. He says, "Let me examine your heart." So anyway, I'm in Luzon, and this doctor, this captain, he was a doctor in for my outfit, and he was a captain because he was a doctor. And he examined my heart and he says, "Okay, I can see that your heart is acting very erratic. I'm going to send you to a hospital. I'm going to send you back to an island, Leyte. Now Leyte was the original island that the Americans attacked in 1944.

*Leyte Gulf?*

**Bob McKeon:** Sure. They took that island over. That was the first island they took over. And three months later they were going to go into Luzon. When I got to Leyte, the island was secure. I was in the hospital there. They had a nice hospital. They brought me in and I said, "What's the . . ." And they told me they were going to examine you for a week to see. Meanwhile, to get from Luzon while the fight was going on and the doctor told me that, "Your heart is not in good shape. We're going to send you to Leyte." I went by plane. I was in a plane with these Japanese prisoners.

*Interesting.*

**Bob McKeon:** Anyway, to make a long story short, when I got to Leyte, I said to myself, "I'm gonna go home." True or not, see, the war wasn't over. This is July.

*Of '45.*

**Bob McKeon:** Of '45.

*Very close to the end.*

**Bob McKeon:** Yeah, close to the end. So I was there a week and the doctor come over and he says, "I'd like to talk to you." I says, "What is it doctor?" I was figuring he was going to say, "Well, you're going to go home." He says, "Not only am I not going to send you home, I'm going to send you back to your outfit." So I'm figuring that the war is going to go on for more years. I says, "I thought I was out. This is the end of me, I'm going to go home."

*What did he say was wrong with your heart?*

**Bob McKeon:** Nothing. He says, "We didn't find anything wrong with you. There's nothing wrong with you." This has been my story all my years. That's why I'm so old. Every time I get examined they say, "You know, there's nothing wrong with you, Mr. McKeon. Really, there's nothing wrong with you." He says, "We're going to send you back to your outfit." Well, you'd be surprised how I got back to my outfit. They don't put you on a plane and say, "Okay, here's your ticket. You're going back to Luzon." No. First of all, I had to take, from Leyte, I had to take a ship to Manila. And then when I got to Manila, they put me in a camp. And this fellow that they assigned me to a place that made foods up for the soldiers. And this guy says, "What don't you stay here?" My papers apparently were either lost and they didn't know who in the hell I was. I was like a missing soldier.

*Sure.*

**Bob McKeon:** I was in there helping in the kitchen, outside of Manila. And then they said, "Okay, we're going to send you back to your outfit." Then they got me on a train in Luzon. And I'm in a train from Manila. I went all the way back up to the central part of Luzon. I almost walked back to my outfit. And then when I got back to my outfit, which was at the end of July. I was only there about a week and I said, "How's everything going?" And then we got word that there was a tremendous explosion over Japan. All of a sudden the word came through. The war's over. I think it was August the 15<sup>th</sup>. I'm not sure of the exact date. But we finally got the word. And all hell broke loose. Oh, the celebrations. And we, "Who's going to go home first?" "Who's not going to go home?" And then I stayed in Luzon. What happened was the government was trying to get everybody home at once. And you couldn't do it.

*And they had a point system, didn't they?*

**Bob McKeon:** They had a point system.

*And how were you on points?*

**Bob McKeon:** I was pretty good. I had about 32 points. I think they gave you a point for every month that you were in the States and they give you two points for every month you were

overseas. So I had been overseas about 17 months, 18 months. That would give me 36, plus I had spent a year in . . . I had about 50. Fifty points.

*If you had enough points to meet the threshold, they'd send you out of there first. So when did you get to come back home?*

**Bob McKeon:** The ship landed December the 15<sup>th</sup>. I got a paper I'm going to show you. December the 15<sup>th</sup>. December the 15<sup>th</sup>, 1945. After 27 days. We went back by boat.

*Did you go back to San Francisco?*

**Bob McKeon:** I think I must have left Manila. We went back by ship all the way back to San Francisco. So it took me about 27 days to go from Frisco to fight in the Pacific. And then 27 days to take me back, all the way back to San Francisco.

*So the war ended in August. And it probably wasn't until November sometime when you got to head home.*

**Bob McKeon:** In other words, there was a tremendous surge of soldiers wanting to go home. They had to get, I think the man in charge of getting them back was Hershey. His name was Hershey. General Hershey. His department was to expedite or get all these men home.

*It was a lot of manpower.*

**Bob McKeon:** I come home with the 37<sup>th</sup> Division. That wasn't my division.

*Sure.*

**Bob McKeon:** But I was allowed to go home with them. In other words, apparently, the 37<sup>th</sup> Division, that's a big outfit. That would be about 15,000 men. A ship was given to them to take them all home in one ship. But they had room for extras, and I was an extra. My outfit, some of the men went home on that ship. Some of us went home on another ship. Everybody's going home different ways, different ships.

*By any means, I guess.*

**Bob McKeon:** By any means.

*When you got to San Francisco, were you discharged at that point?*

**Bob McKeon:** No. What happened was I landed at San Francisco and as the ship pulled in under the Golden Gate Bridge, they had all these people fix signs on the wharfs. "Welcome home, welcome home." The boats would (sound horns). That was a nice welcome. When I was taken off the ship, I was sent up to Sacramento, California. I stayed there about a week. It was so cold. It was a barracks, you know. It was a barracks that had been utilized to send men overseas. Now they're coming back. And where are they going to send them for a week? They gotta get trains. So finally, after that, I left San Francisco. I went up to Sacramento. From Sacramento, they says, "Get your duffle bag ready." There's a train going to take us, a certain amount of men, was going to go back from Sacramento, California, all the way back to Fort Dix, New Jersey. And on the way home, some people were dropped off at Denver. Some people were dropped off at Saint



Louie. The train would drop off various men. I got to Fort Dix, New Jersey, and I was there with quite a few of the fellas from my outfit, the 251<sup>st</sup>. We were still together. About 10 of us. And they discharged me.

*Was that right before Christmas?*

**Bob McKeon:** I was discharged New Year's Eve.

*Oh, New Year's Eve. Okay.*

**Bob McKeon:** And I went home and my future wife, they were having a New Year's Eve party in Brooklyn. And I showed up. Oh, they were so happy to see me. So I spent my first week, like on a New Year's. After the Army, on New Year's Eve, I left the Army. So I was in there three years.

*That's great. During that whole time you were gone, were you able to write home to your parents pretty regularly, or get letters from them?*

**Bob McKeon:** You know what? Your first name is James?

*Yes sir.*

**Bob McKeon:** You know, James, every letter that I sent home to my mother, she never threw them out. I got them all in a bag.

*Wow.*

**Bob McKeon:** I've been taking them along with me all these years.

*That's something else.*

**Bob McKeon:** She saved all the letters and I've got the letters. But they're getting so old now. They're 70 years old. The papers are falling apart.

*That's amazing that you have all those. How many do you think it is?*

**Bob McKeon:** I got about 200.

*Two hundred letters.*

**Bob McKeon:** Two hundred letters. V-mail, they called it. Some of it was V-mail.

*Sure. Where they'd shrink it down and censor, I guess, some of it.*

**Bob McKeon:** That's what they did. That's what they did. So the saddest, I got a picture of this fellow who's a handsome man, beautiful fellow. He was the radio operator that went up that day and was killed. We were only in action the first day. It would've been me if he had been sick. I always say, "If he had been sick that day, I was going to go up." And probably I might have been killed. So does that zip up the story? Oh, then I got married.

*You mentioned your future wife, seeing her when you got discharged. So you had known her before you left to go in the Army.*

**Bob McKeon:** Oh yes.

*Did you write to her as well while you were in the Army?*

**Bob McKeon:** We even had an engagement party before I went overseas. We had a nice engagement party.

*Were you able to get letters from her as well?*

**Bob McKeon:** Oh yeah.

*How long would it take to get a letter once she sent it to you? Would it take a couple of weeks?*

**Bob McKeon:** I'd say about a week.

*A week. Okay.*

**Bob McKeon:** Then they said, "Look, this is too clumsy. The letters." They started doing it with V-mail. I don't know how they worked it. I don't know. They took a photostatic copy?

*Yeah, and shrunk it down.*

**Bob McKeon:** They shrunk it down.

*It would take less space, I guess.*

**Bob McKeon:** Yeah. So that's the story, James.

*So when you got back home, you got married and started a family?*

**Bob McKeon:** I've had a family.

*I presume you stayed in the New York area? And worked in the New York area for a while?*

**Bob McKeon:** After I left the service I come back. We got married in June of 1946. We had three children. Two of them were twins. But this is my daughter. She's one of the twins. I come home, I got married, and then everything became more placid. A very quiet life. I run a quiet life. I wasn't . . . I'm trying to think of anything unusual that happened when I was married.

*When was it that you came to Texas? How did you come to Texas?*

**Bob McKeon:** Oh yeah. In fact that's a question I usually ask of people. "What brought you to Texas?" A certain amount of people will say, "The reason why I'm in Texas is because I was born here." But now, more and more people . . . If you ask some . . . Like if I'm going to a doctor's office or wherever I go and meet new people, I say, "Were you born in Texas?" Like an introduction. "No," they say. "I wasn't born in Texas." They tell me I was born in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Ohio, Iowa. What brought me to here was . . . My daughter, her first husband . . . She got married, my daughter. She got married and she married her first husband. He got a job with IBM.

*So that brought the family to Texas.*

**Bob McKeon:** Now, IBM. You're young, but IBM, say about 30 years ago, was tremendous here.

*Oh sure.*

**Bob McKeon:** Oh, they hired, they must have hired about half the people that were working in Austin. But he had a choice. He had a choice of working for a gas company out in El Paso, Texas, or coming to Austin and working for IBM. And he decided to . . . Meanwhile, what happened to me is . . . I was living in Brooklyn. I got married. My wife's family was from Brooklyn, so naturally I stayed in Brooklyn. But then I decided that I didn't like it in Brooklyn anymore. The neighborhood was changing. It became very . . .

*When was this, in the '80s?*

**Bob McKeon:** This is 1980.

*1980. Okay.*

**Bob McKeon:** So, I said to myself, "I want to get out of here. Out of Brooklyn." So I moved to New Jersey. New Brunswick, a town called Spotswood, New Jersey. It's just outside of New Brunswick, New Jersey. And I bought a house there. We stayed there for about seven years. Meanwhile, my daughter, her husband, previous to getting this job, oh, he got a job with IBM eventually. But before that he went to the University of Arizona. My wife, my daughter and her first husband, they moved to, after they got married in Brooklyn and Spotswood, New Jersey, they moved out to Phoenix, Arizona, because that's where the University of Arizona is, and he graduated from the University of Arizona. So while he was out there, my wife and I visited him while he was studying and graduating eventually from the University of Arizona. We come out to visit him, and I said to my wife, you know it was about 11 o'clock in the afternoon, and I says, "You know, this is a nice city, Phoenix." I said, "Maybe we should buy a house here," which we did. We bought a house in Phoenix, Arizona. I was in the post office and I hadn't retired yet. So I had two years to retire so my sister-in-law, my wife's sister, she says, "Bob, I'll take over the place while you're waiting to come out here." So she moved out there with her two sons. Eventually I retired from the post office, and now I'm gonna go out and live out in Phoenix. I was there three months and I said to my wife, "I'm getting outta here."

*Too hot?*

**Bob McKeon:** It's too hot. I didn't like the traffic. It was terrible. I don't know if you've ever visited Phoenix.

*I have but I've not really driven in a lot of the traffic.*

**Bob McKeon:** You know, I don't like to be in too much traffic, and the main artery in Phoenix is Highway 17. That's the main drag. Goes all the way from northern Arizona all the way down to Tucson, then to 10, then you go back east.

*Sure.*

**Bob McKeon:** So I was there and all of a sudden I see this guy at 6 o'clock at night, he's repairing his car across the street. Oh, I says . . . Meanwhile, the reason I had moved there was

because of my daughter. You know, you'd be surprised. Families usually follow their daughter. She left. She left Phoenix, and her husband got a job with IBM.

*And that's what brought you to Texas?*

**Bob McKeon:** That's what brought me to Texas. We come to visit her while she was in Texas, in Georgetown, Texas. And I come to visit her and I says, "We're gettin' out of Phoenix." Meanwhile he had got a job at IBM, and they had purchased a house in Georgetown, Texas, and we came to visit her, and within hours, within a week, we had bought a house in Georgetown, Texas. I says, "I'm getting out of Phoenix." We couldn't take it. The heat. So, meanwhile my daughter, eventually she lived in Georgetown, Texas, and I bought a house in Georgetown, Texas, and I, what'd you call it? I bought a house in Georgetown, Texas, and I lived there 30 years.

*That's great.*

**Bob McKeon:** And I moved out of there three years ago, the reason being that my wife passed away in July of '79. And I left, when my wife passed away, I says, "I'm not gonna stay here in this house," because my daughter was worried about me staying alone. So, are you there Debra? What was the name of that what'd you call it?

**Debra:** Heatherwilde.

**Bob McKeon:** Do you know that place?

*No sir, I don't.*

**Bob McKeon:** Tell him about that Debra.

**Debra:** You tell him about it.

*Is that a nursing home or residence?*

**Bob McKeon:** No, no, oh no. It's a retirement development. But you've gotta take care of yourself. They're not gonna feed you or do anything or take you around. No, you gotta have your own car. You don't have to have a car because what they do is they have a bus that takes you anyplace you want to go. So my daughter got me in this development which is in Pflugerville.

*Okay.*

**Bob McKeon:** Where does it cross? What's the two roads that it crosses?

**Debra:** Heatherwilde and 1825.

*Okay.*

**Bob McKeon:** I don't know if you're familiar with Pflugerville.

*Sure, I know where that is.*

**Bob McKeon:** Oh, it's a beautiful place, and I stayed there for about 18 months. Yeah, about 18 months I stayed there, and meanwhile what happened was, while I'm there, I got my own car, I'm driving to different little places but I notice I'm fading away. I can't drive right. I can't see things like I used to. So meanwhile my wife . . . My wife, I keep calling my daughter my wife. She had purchased this house and she says, "Daddy, you better come in and live with me because you can't take care of yourself no more."

*I've got three daughters, the oldest is four. I hope if I make it to your age, I'll have one of them that can look after me like that too. So that's a blessing definitely.*

**Bob McKeon:** Well, not at your age now because you're probably about 25.

*No, I'm 35, but I plan to live as long as I can. Hopefully one day one of my girls will help take care of my wife and me too.*

**Bob McKeon:** But you know what I always say? In life you always gotta have a fall-back position.

*You gotta have family if you can.*

**Bob McKeon:** Now in my particular case, my fall-back position was my daughter. Now if I didn't have my daughter as a fall-back position, I'd wind up, I'd be alone. I could'a went with my . . . Oh, I have a son that lives in Greensboro, North Carolina, and I have another son that lives my himself but neither one of them I would like to live with them. I don't want to live with them. You know, there's no rapport there.

*Let me ask you, sir, to go back a little bit to what you were telling me about your time in the service. You mentioned the one gentleman named Freddy that was a fellow radio operator with you. He was from New York, right?*

**Bob McKeon:** He's also from New York State.

*Did you ever have any contact with his family or friends?*

**Bob McKeon:** No, I should have. I would have liked to, but you know, when you come out of the service, everything is hitting you at once. You're gonna get married, you're gotta go back to find out . . .

*Oh yeah, definitely a change for you.*

**Bob McKeon:** Everything is changed. What they would do is, like I was working, when I went into the service, I was working with a concern called the Railway Express Agency. They were controlled by, you know, an outfit today, they call it the American Express?

*Sure.*

**Bob McKeon:** Well, they owned Railway Express. They used to be a delivery. What they would do is, when you left the service, you were guaranteed that the outfit that you left to go into the service, you'd get your job back.

*Go back to them.*

**Bob McKeon:** You would get your job back. So I got my job back. I stayed there about six years and then I went into, I worked for United Parcel Service, and then I worked for . . . Oh, my last years I worked at the Post Office for 28 years.

*Let me ask you too, you said you grew up in Brooklyn. What part of Brooklyn did you live in? I know there's a lot of different neighborhoods and that sort of thing?*

**Bob McKeon:** Flatbush.

*Flatbush. So you were close to old Dodger Stadium or Ebbets Field?*

**Bob McKeon:** No, that was a little bit further in towards Manhattan. Do you know . . .?

*I knew that Ebbets Field was in the Flatbush area.*

**Bob McKeon:** Yeah, but Ebbets Field closed down in 1956. They left. Oh, you'd be surprised what happened in Brooklyn. Who was the owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers?

*O'Malley.*

**Bob McKeon:** O'Malley, was it O'Malley? If they could have tarred and feathered him . . .

*Yeah, he wasn't very popular.*

**Bob McKeon:** Or string him up.

*Yeah, he wasn't popular in Brooklyn after that, yeah.*

**Bob McKeon:** You know, nobody knew about this. All of a sudden, Brooklyn Dodgers were leaving here. We're not gonna stay in Brooklyn no more. We're going to San Francisco.

*Los Angeles.*

**Bob McKeon:** It was all for money. It was all money. Well, you see Ebbets Field, the capacity crowd for Ebbets Field was approximately 33,000 or 35,000, squeeze a few more in.

*Yeah, pretty small for a major league park.*

**Bob McKeon:** Yeah, it was small. Well, I think the stadium they built, Candlewood is it?

*No, Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles.*

**Bob McKeon:** I don't know what the name of it is. They have a certain name for it?

*Dodger Stadium.*

**Bob McKeon:** Well, anyway, I think that stadium they could put in 55,000 or 60,000. So they elected to do that. So they left Brooklyn, and poor Brooklyn. I think the year previous to them leaving they had won the World Series, had everything going for them.

*Yeah, in 1955.*

**Bob McKeon:** They had beat the Yankees. Oh, the terrible Yankees.

*Yes sir, it was certainly economics with Los Angeles booming and that sort of thing. I was just curious which neighborhood you had grown up in because I've heard about . . .*

**Bob McKeon:** Oh yeah, Flatbush.

*There's Canarsie and all these other places, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and you hear all these stories about different neighborhoods in Brooklyn, and some being better than others and that sort of thing. But you said that Flatbush had changed a lot during the years you lived there?*

**Bob McKeon:** That was the reason why I had to . . .

*Primarily crime?*

**Bob McKeon:** Mostly crime, yeah. And what they were having, at that particular time, they were having a lot of racial trouble, you know. They don't have it now.

*I know it was bad then.*

**Bob McKeon:** But then there was screaming, ranting and raving going on, and oh. And then the subways, you never know if a fight was gonna come out while you're in the subway, a fight was gonna go on.

*You had to get away from that I'm sure.*

**Bob McKeon:** You had to get away from all that. That's why I went and left for New Jersey.

*Let me ask you too, sir. I think it's amazing that you still have all those letters that you sent to your mom. Do you have any pictures from your time?*

**Bob McKeon:** Yes, would you like to . . .

*I'd love to see those and, in fact, at some point after we wrap up the interview here in a second. On our website we have a lot of the interviews we post on there along with pictures, and we'd love if we could make copies of those and put them on the website. Because that way people can listen to this interview, and they can also see the pictures which always add a lot.*

**Bob McKeon:** You know what, I was wondering there, Charlie. I wonder if your father was interviewed?

**Charlie:** I'm going to talk to him after y'all get done.

*Sure. No, I don't think we've interviewed him.*

**Bob McKeon:** He just passed away a year ago, wasn't it?

**Charlie:** Yeah, a year and a half ago. I'll talk to him later.

*Yes sir. Well, sir, we'll go ahead and wrap up the recorded part but I just wanted to really thank you for letting me talk to you today. As I mentioned before we started, this interview is for posterity. Our goal is that people can hear this interview hundreds of years from now. We have at the Land Office documents that go back to the 1700s.*

**Bob McKeon:** You know, you just introduced me to a subject.

*But what I wanted to say, sir, is that we have the land grant that David Crockett's widow received after he was killed at the Alamo, and we have the original registro that was kept by Stephen F. Austin that has the original settlers of Texas. So our goal is to add these interviews to that.*

**Bob McKeon:** Will that come through the mail or something?

*Yes sir. We're going to mail you your interview. With the idea of posterity in mind, what would you want to say to somebody a couple hundred years from now that might be listening to this interview.*

**Bob McKeon:** Well, the one thing that I've noticed, the one thing that I've noticed in my position, my observation is the tremendous advances that the medical, medicine has contributed. For example, in 1960, my father had very bad high blood pressure. There were no medicines. All they did was put you on a salt-free diet, because even today you gotta be careful about your salt. But today they got all kinds of medicines, and they got all kinds of . . . The only thing they can't, they haven't grappled with too well is cancer. My wife died of pancreatic cancer, and that's deadly. That's one of the deadly ones. Colon cancer, they can do a lot of with that now, and they got the esophagus cancer and different cancers, okay.

*Well, sir, before we go look at the pictures, let me go ahead and wrap up the recording part.*

**Bob McKeon:** Oh, you're gonna do what you have to do.

*Yeah, I'm going to go ahead and turn it off but I just want to thank you for your time. On behalf of Commissioner Patterson and everybody at the Land Office, we want to thank you for your service to our nation because that's what this is all about.*

**Bob McKeon:** Oh, that's quite all right.

*Thank you very much, sir.*